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ANDREW JOHNSON AND THE HOMESTEAD LAW

The recent death of the Hon. Galusha A. Grow, of Pennsylvania, calls up two items of history wherein he and Andrew Johnson touch elbows.

First, they were both prominent in the inauguration and prosecution of the war; one of them as a senator, of already admitted ability, now made still more prominent by the circumstance of his State being in rebellion against the general government, a distinction given to no other member of the Senate; while the other was the Speaker of the House when it voted \$500,000,000 to prosecute the war. From this prominence each of them was voted for, for Vice-President, in Lincoln's second term, Johnson winning the place by only one vote, and the fact that he was Lincoln's choice no doubt secured him the place.

What would have been the effect upon the country, and upon the individual lives of the two men, had Grow won instead of Johnson? While no one knows, such questions have a peculiar interest when the margin of choice has been so close. It is more than likely that Grow's administration would have provided less antagonism than Johnson's, and it is equally probable that the policies of the Republican party would have continued as they did.

As to the future of Grow, the remarkable circumstance of a more than thirty years hiatus in official life, measured by the time when he left Congress in the sixties to come back in 1894 as the congressman-at-large from Pennsylvania, shows that he did not have that hankering for public places that is a marked peculiarity of many. In fact he does not seem to have sought office, and did decline the mission to Russia about half way in the gap while he was a private citizen; although it is a place that had been filled by such men as Simon Cameron, Cassius M. Clay, James Buchanan, John Randolph, William Pinckney and John Quincy Adams. So with this turn of mind he would most likely have sought permanent retirement after filling the Presidency, and the very fact that Johnson did not quit after he filled it, is suggestive that his political activity would have

made him an aspirant for the high place in the future presidential years.

Second, the connection of each of them with the Homestead Law brings them close together again, if it does not bring up doubt as to which of them is entitled to the more credit for this great boon. Grow is known as the "Father of the Homestead Law," but did not this come more from the fact that he signed the bill as Speaker than from other things? That he was active in the matter all along, there is no doubt; but that Andrew Johnson did more in this great work than is generally now credited to him in books and periodicals, seems equally certain.

The peculiar place that Andrew Johnson filled in our politics during the period from 1860 to 1875, the most exciting in our history, makes it difficult for either party or either section to do him entire justice. If not a "statesman without a country," he was at least a statesman without a State during much of this period, and the public man in this country with neither party nor State behind him does not have the best chance for the perpetuation of his fame, when it is to be determined by what he has actually done.

That Andrew Johnson was a patriot and prompted by love of country in the main great acts of his life, the public is now coming to admit. That he showed a moral courage that was truly sublime, when in 1861 as the lone Senator from the South he stood for the Union, no one has ever denied. That he exhibited equal independence when he refused to yield his views of Reconstruction to Congress is also admitted. Breaking first with his section, and then with the victorious party, he was "ground between the upper and the nether mill-stone," and we are sometimes made to look in vain in the books at our command for the things that are his, of right; and yet his work was such as "posterity will not willingly let die."

But what did he actually do in the matter of the Homestead Law? The following is taken from the address of Senator Paddock, of Nebraska, January 12, 1876, in the memorial services to the memory of the dead senator. Paddock's prominence as leader in the Republican party helps to strengthen Johnson's

claim, on account of the great prejudice of Republicans against him after impeachment:

“But, sir, I am impelled by a sense of duty to the State I have the honor to represent, in part, upon this floor to briefly express, on the behalf of all the people thereof, of whatever party, sect, or class, the universal sorrow occasioned there by the death of Andrew Johnson. Especially, Sir, do I offer here for the memory of the devoted Senator the gratitude and the unselfish reverence, homely though it be, of the thousands in my State who to-day occupy farms of broad fertile acres sacred to them through the beneficent provisions of the homestead law. They, Sir, and the generations that are to come after them, will ever hold in grateful remembrance his manful advocacy of the principles of that law long before its enactment. At a time, Sir, when it had but few if any friends but himself, and seemingly but little hope from the future, Andrew Johnson pointed the way, and the Republican party, to its honor and its glory be it said, afterward followed therein until this great boon for the homeless and the landless was secured.”

The statement that he “pointed the way” when “it had few if any friends but himself,” seems stronger than funeral license would have permitted, if untrue, especially if it did injustice to others. Galusha A. Grow was then living at Houston, Texas, as a railroad president, only a little past fifty, and if his friends and those familiar with the matter under discussion ever called Senator Paddock’s statement in question we find no account of it.

Then further, what were some of the facts in Andrew Johnson’s life that corroborate the strong words of Senator Paddock. Born and bred in poverty, Andrew Johnson began his public career as the friend of the poor, and he started as alderman of his adopted town, the representative of the “Workingman’s Party.” At that time, the large landholders had undue influence, as he and his followers thought, in the affairs of Tennessee, and he favored such changes in the constitution of 1834 as would curtail their power.

He served in Congress ten years, starting in 1843, and during this time his advocacy of the homestead “made him obnoxious to the Southern element of his party,” and he was one of the first of our public men to whom the now familiar term of “dem-

agogue" was applied, caused no doubt from the fact that he was one of the first to take advanced ground in favor of the poor, especially in the question of the land.

In his first message to the Legislature, serving as Governor of Tennessee, 1853-1857, he dwelt at length upon the homestead and other measures for the benefit of the working classes, and was hence called the "Mechanic Governor."

From the Governor's chair he went to the Senate, where he contended still for the homestead, and Richardson in his "Messages and Papers of the Presidents," says that "on May 20, 1858, he made his greatest speech on the homestead," and this language indicates that he had been making others.

Since beginning this article, I find the following item from a former member of Congress, addressed to the Nashville (Tenn.) *American*, corroborating the foregoing:

Since coming to this city on a short visit, I have seen in several newspapers a statement to the effect that Hon. Galusha A. Grow, of Pennsylvania, recently dead, was the father of the wise and highly beneficent legislation in favor of a homestead by settlers on the public lands. Whilst not intending in the least degree to detract from the honor which is due to Mr. Grow for his labors in behalf of that great measure, it is due to the truth of history that it be remembered, especially by the people of Tennessee, that Andrew Johnson, member of the House of Representatives, Senator and President of the United States, was the first to propose and advocate before the people and the Congress that measure, which, whilst I was a member of Congress from Tennessee, passed both houses and was vetoed by President Buchanan on what he considered constitutional objections. This was several years before 1862, when Mr. Grow's bill was passed and became a law (exact date not now remembered, not having the records before me). I well remember that when the bill passed the Senate, Mr. Johnson left his seat in the Senate, came over to the House and urged the Democratic members, especially those from Tennessee, to rally to pass the bill, which was done. I think this occurred in 1857 or 1858. Very respectfully,

JNO. V. WRIGHT.

Memphis, April 5, [1907].

Grow reached Congress in 1850, the youngest member of the body. He was a graduate of Amherst College of only a few

years before, and was fortunate to become the political heir of David Wilmot, his law partner. He served only one term with Johnson, and their preparation had been vastly different, for Johnson, now more than forty years old, had won his place by his own unaided energies. Johnson's whole "manner of life" had been such as to make him an effective friend of the landless, and it is very reasonable that Grow did not surpass him in the great work, but most likely took it up when Johnson put it down; or rather when Johnson changed his place of work from Washington to Nashville, to come back again after four years at home, still to do battle for the old cause. This first came to a vote in 1859, having then many friends to pass it in the lower house, but not yet enough in the Senate, which then, as now, was slow to move for the interests of the masses.

The cordial recognition of the merits and importance of Grow's great speech, "Man's Rights to the Soil," soon after he entered Congress, and before he was thirty — a remarkable performance at his age and experience — does not injure at all the argument here set forth; or rather it offsets in no way the testimony of Paddock and Wright. These suggestions are offered, not to detract from any one, but that it may help toward giving honor where honor is due.

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